

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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STATUS REVIEW OF THE SAN ESTEBAN ISLAND CHUCKWALLA

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is reviewing the San Esteban Island chuckwalla to determine if the giant lizard should be proposed for either the endangered or threatened lists, the agency announced in the March 6, 1979, Federal Register.

The chuckwalla is considered a separate and distinct subspecies due to its isolation on the small desert island on the Gulf of California for which it is named.

Much larger than other chuckwallas of the mainland--or, for that matter, any other lizards of the North American Continent outside the tropics--Sauromalus varius (evil lizard) specimens often reach 2 feet in overall length.

Its grainy, sand-colored and shadowy splotched skin provides almost perfect camouflage against all predators except humans. Unfortunately, the chuckwalla's size, rather small head, loose bean-bag body, and long thick tail sometimes cause it to be killed, mistakenly, for the poisonous gila monster which it resembles.

But the real threat, according to Dr. Ted Case, who has just completed a 10-year study of the animal for the University of California, is the burgeoning United States pet industry. Citing such facts as the animal's limited number, specialized habitat, and low reproduction rate--along with its instant popularity as a novelty pet--he stated that he believes the 4,500 San Esteban chuckwallas in existence are in jeopardy. Dr. Case presented his study in support of his petition under provisions of the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Persons with information that may assist in determining the status of the San Esteban chuckwalla are invited to write the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. All comments received by June 4, 1978, will be considered.

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